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ABSTRACT

This report presents estimates of the number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States in mid-2001 for the total unauthorized population, Mexican unauthorized population, and non-Mexican Central American unauthorized population. Researchers subtracted estimates of the numbers of persons residing in the country legally from the numbers of foreign-born persons in official government surveys (which contain both legal and unauthorized persons), then adjusted for extra undercount of such persons in the surveys. Overall, the size of the total unauthorized population in mid-2001 varied from 3.4-5.8 million, with a mid-range of 7.8 million. The size of the unauthorized non-Mexican Central American population varied from 1.2-1.9 million, with a mid-range of 1.5 million. For the total and Mexican unauthorized populations, researchers estimated the numbers of years that members of these populations had been in the U.S. Overall, 2.35 million unauthorized Mexicans would be eligible for legalization if at least 10 years of U.S. residence were required, with 3.5 million eligible if at least 5 years were required. About 3.8 million people in the total unauthorized population would be eligible if at least 10 years of residence were required, with 5.8 million eligible if at least 5 years were required. (Contains 11 references.) (SM)

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Study

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Estimates of Numbers of Unauthorized Migrants Residing In the United States:

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by

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ESTIMATES OF NUMBERS OF UNAUTHORIZED MIGRANTS RESIDING IN THE UNITED STATES: THE TOTAL, MEXICAN, AND NON-MEXICAN CENTRAL AMERICAN UNAUTHORIZED POPULATIONS IN MID-2001

The question of unauthorized migration to the United States has often galvanized public opinion and attracted the attention of U.S. policy makers (U.S. Commission on Immigration Reform 1994, 1997; Bean et al. 1997; Espenshade and Belanger 1998). Examples are provided by three special governmental initiatives undertaken over the past three decades to address immigration issues, each of which targeted unauthorized migration. First, in 1981 the Select Commission on Immigration and Refugee Policy (SCIRP) released a report, noting that "one issue has emerged as most pressing--the problem of undocumented/illegal migration" (1981:35). Second, in 1986 Congress passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) in an effort to reduce unauthorized migration by (1) legalizing migrants already living and working in the country and (2) adopting employer sanctions in an attempt to make it harder for future migrants to find jobs (Bean, Vernez and Keely 1989). Third, in 1996 Congress passed welfare reform and immigration legislation in part in an attempt to limit unauthorized migration by tightening access to public benefits available to noncitizen immigrants (Espenshade, Baraka, and Huber 1997; Van Hook and Bean 1998).

Most recently, the question of the size of the unauthorized population in the United States has reemerged in connection with two issues. One derives from the recommendations of the Bush Administration that special programs for Mexican workers be legislated to regularize their status, including the possibility of some sort of legalization program. The issue here concerns how many unauthorized persons might qualify for such legalization programs. Another derives from discrepancies observed between the 2000 Census count of

the U.S. population and the expected population size calculated by bringing the 1990 population forward to 2000 by adding in births, subtracting deaths, and taking into account net immigration. The issue here, given that the expected figure fell substantially short of the actual count, was whether more unauthorized migrants might reside in the United States in 2000 than had previously been thought to be the case.

This brief report presents estimates of the number of unauthorized immigrants in the United States in mid-2001 for three separate groups: the total unauthorized population, the Mexican unauthorized population, and the non-Mexican Central American unauthorized population. The approach to estimation used is one set forth recently by Bean, et al (2001) that extends and amplifies work originally begun as part of the Mexico/U.S. Binational Migration Study (1997; Bean, et al. 1998). The specific features of the approach are described in detail in Bean, et al (2001). Basically, the method involves subtracting estimates of the numbers of persons residing in the country legally from the numbers of foreign born persons in official government surveys (which are known to contain both legal and unauthorized persons), and then adjusting for extra undercount of such persons in the surveys. The resulting figures give estimates of various unauthorized populations in the country.

The results are summarized in Tables 1-6 for each of the three groups. In the case of the total unauthorized population, we estimate that the size of this group in mid-2001 varies from a low of about 5.9 million to a high of about 9.9 million, with a mid-range estimate of about 7.8 million (Table 2). In the case of the Mexican unauthorized population, we estimate that the size of this group varies from a low of about 3.4 million to a high of about 5.8 million, with a mid-range estimate of about 4.5 million (Table 4). In the case of the non-Mexican Central American unauthorized population, we estimate that the size of this group varies from

a low of about 1.2 million to a high of about 1.9 million, with a mid-range estimate of about 1.5 million (Table 6).

For the total and Mexican unauthorized populations, we also estimate the numbers of years the members of these populations have been in the United States. This is of interest because legislation is frequently proposed to provide legalization for unauthorized immigrants who have resided continuously in the United States for certain lengths of time. Thus, distributions of unauthorized populations by the number of years of residence provide indications of the numbers of persons who might be eligible for legalization if a certain length of residency were stipulated as a condition for legalization. For example, in the case of the Mexican unauthorized population, about 2.35 million persons would be eligible for legalization if at least ten years of residence in the country were required, and about 3.5 million persons would be eligible if at least five years of residence were required. In the case of the total unauthorized population, about 3.8 million persons would be eligible if at least ten years of residence were required and about 5.8 million would be if at least five years of residence were required.

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Table 1

Estimated Number of Legally Resident Immigrants, 2001
(Population in Thousands)

	Assumptions For:				
	Ave. Annual Emigration	Resident SAWs	Ambiguous Status Imm's		Estimate
1)	Low	Low	Low	(225,000)	23,156
2)	(45,000)	(725,000)	Moderate	(444,000)	23,375
3)			High	(667,000)	23,598
4)	Low	High	Low	(225,000)	23,297
5)	(45,000)	(865,500)	Moderate	(444,000)	23,516
6)			High	(667,000)	23,739
7)	Moderate	Low	Low	(225,000)	22,421
8)	(80,000)	(725,000)	Moderate	(444,000)	22,640
9)			High	(667,000)	22,863
10)	Moderate	High	Low	(225,000)	22,562
11)	(80,000)	(865,500)	Moderate	(444,000)	22,781
12)			High	(667,000)	23,004
13)	High	Low	Low	(225,000)	21,686
14)	(115,000)	(725,000)	Moderate	(444,000)	21,905
15)			High	(667,000)	22,128
16)	High	High	Low	(225,000)	21,827
17)	(115,000)	(865,500)	Moderate	(444,000)	22,046
18)			High	(667,000)	22,269

Low Estimate	21,686
Mid-Range Estimate	22,710
High Estimate	23,739

Table 2

Estimated Number of Unauthorized Migrants, 2001
(Population in Millions)

	Assumptions For:				
	Enumerated Foreign-born (millions)	Total Legal Foreign-born (millions)	Underenumeration Rate		Est'd Unauth'd Foreign-born (millions)
			Legal	Unauthorized	
1)	(28.650)	Low	0.5%	15.0%	8.321
2)		(21.686)	0.5%	25.0%	9.430
3)			2.0%	15.0%	8.703
4)			2.0%	25.0%	9.864
5)	(28.650)	High	0.5%	15.0%	5.918
6)		(23.739)	0.5%	25.0%	6.707
7)			2.0%	15.0%	6.337
8)			2.0%	25.0%	7.182

Low Estimate	5.918
High Estimate	9.864
Median Estimate	7.751
Mid-range Estimate	7.777

Table 3

Estimated Number of Legally Resident Mexican Immigrants, 2001
(Population in Thousands)

	Assumptions For:				
	Ave. Annual Emigration	Resident SAWs	Ambiguous Status Imm's		Estimate
1)	Low	Low	Low	(200,000)	5,286
2)	(25,000)	(580,000)	Moderate	(400,000)	5,486
3)			High	(600,000)	5,686
4)	Low	High	Low	(200,000)	5,396
5)	(25,000)	(690,000)	Moderate	(400,000)	5,596
6)			High	(600,000)	5,796
7)	Moderate	Low	Low	(200,000)	4,866
8)	(45,000)	(580,000)	Moderate	(400,000)	5,066
9)			High	(600,000)	5,266
10)	Moderate	High	Low	(200,000)	4,976
11)	(45,000)	(690,000)	Moderate	(400,000)	5,176
12)			High	(600,000)	5,376
13)	High	Low	Low	(200,000)	4,446
14)	(65,000)	(580,000)	Moderate	(400,000)	4,646
15)			High	(600,000)	4,846
16)	High	High	Low	(200,000)	4,556
17)	(65,000)	(690,000)	Moderate	(400,000)	4,756
18)			High	(600,000)	4,956

Low Estimate	4,446
Mid-Range Estimate	5,121
High Estimate	5,796

Table 4

Estimated Number of Unauthorized Mexican Migrants, 2001
(Population in Millions)

	Assumptions For:				
	Enumerated Foreign-born (millions)	Total Legal Foreign-born (millions)	Underenumeration Rate		Est'd Unauth'd Foreign-born (millions)
			Legal	Unauthorized	
1)	(8.592)	Low	2.0%	15.0%	4.982
2)		(4.446)	2.0%	25.0%	5.647
3)			4.0%	15.0%	5.087
4)			4.0%	25.0%	5.765
5)	(8.592)	High	2.0%	15.0%	3.426
6)		(5.796)	2.0%	25.0%	3.883
7)			4.0%	15.0%	3.562
8)			4.0%	25.0%	4.037

Low Estimate	3.426
High Estimate	5.765
Median Estimate	4.510
Mid-range Estimate	4.531

Table 5

Estimated Number of Legally Resident Central American Immigrants, 2001
(Population in Thousands)

	Assumptions For:				
	Ave. Annual Emigration	Resident SAWs	Ambiguous Status Imm's		Estimate
1)	Low	Low	Low	(20,000)	1,024
2)	(8,000)	(54,000)	Moderate	(40,000)	1,044
3)			High	(60,000)	1,064
4)	Low	High	Low	(20,000)	1,068
5)	(8,000)	(98,000)	Moderate	(40,000)	1,088
6)			High	(60,000)	1,108
7)	Moderate	Low	Low	(20,000)	877
8)	(15,000)	(54,000)	Moderate	(40,000)	897
9)			High	(60,000)	917
10)	Moderate	High	Low	(20,000)	921
11)	(15,000)	(98,000)	Moderate	(40,000)	941
12)			High	(60,000)	961
13)	High	Low	Low	(20,000)	730
14)	(22,000)	(54,000)	Moderate	(40,000)	750
15)			High	(60,000)	770
16)	High	High	Low	(20,000)	774
17)	(22,000)	(98,000)	Moderate	(40,000)	794
18)			High	(60,000)	814

Low Estimate	730
Mid-Range Estimate	919
High Estimate	1,108

Table 6

Estimated Number of Unauthorized Central American Migrants, 2001
(Population in Millions)

	Assumptions For:				
	Enumerated Foreign-born (millions)	Total Legal Foreign-born (millions)	Underenumeration Rate		Est'd Unauth'd Foreign-born (millions)
			Legal	Unauthorized	
1)	(2.102)	Low	2.0%	15.0%	1.631
2)		(0.730)	2.0%	25.0%	1.849
3)			4.0%	15.0%	1.648
4)			4.0%	25.0%	1.868
5)	(2.102)	High	2.0%	15.0%	1.195
6)		(1.108)	2.0%	25.0%	1.355
7)			4.0%	15.0%	1.222
8)			4.0%	25.0%	1.384

Low Estimate	1.195
High Estimate	1.868
Median Estimate	1.508
Mid-range Estimate	1.513

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